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IV.

THE SPELL OF ASHTAROTH.

OF the numerous stories founded on biblical themes, a few only have met with popular favor. "The Spell of Ashtaroth" * will undoubtedly be classed among the few. It consists of a series of brilliant pictures which are thrown upon the canvas with such bold, strong outlines and rich oriental coloring that they appeal to the deepest emotions of the spectator. The semi-tropical country in which the scenes are laid furnishes an admirable background, perhaps, indeed the only one which could fittingly interpret these broad effects.

Adriel, the son of Achan, the Israelite who appropriated and concealed forbidden spoil at the taking of Jericho, attempts to flee with a beautiful maiden of Jericho, whose life he has spared. He is discovered, and with his father's household is condemned to be stoned to death. The three pictures which really constitute the story are the falling of the walls of Jericho; the casting of the lot whereby the offense of the house of Achan is discovered, and the execution of the sentence of death. As a sustained narrative of persons or places, the book cannot be regarded as successful, since all else is subsidiary to these central themes. The colors are laid on with a lavish hand, and the impressions are not easily banished. It may be objected that a somewhat partisan view of the Divine justice is taken by the author. The sole Canaanitish survivor is a beautiful young girl, a devotee of Ashtaroth, it is true, but delineated in all the fascination of youth and beauty, and in pleasing contrast to the rude severity of the conquering Hebrew. The stern facts about the worshipers of the goddess offering human sacrifices, blood-thirsty and fiendish in their cruel and impure rites, and naught but foul blots on the face of the earth, are entirely overlooked. However, the author is not dealing with the principles of religious ethics, and he has made a success in the line which he attempted, that of writing a powerful, dramatic, oriental novel.

V.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IF that may be called a successful book of travel which awakens in the hearts of its readers eager longings to follow in the footsteps of the voyagers, then may Mrs. Sheldon's recital of the adventures of three Yankee girls in Zulu Land† be classed among the successes of the season. The charm of an agreeable traveling companion largely depends on his adaptability to all possible and impossible circumstances. The three sisters who make the trip to South Africa for the health of one, possess this delightful characteristic in an unusual degree, and travel for five years in and about South Africa, living in odd little inns, riding in coaches and ox wagons with royal contentment, and secure in full measure the object of their journey, with abundance of good times besides. Ostrich and sheep farms, gold and diamond fields are visited, and all sorts of incidents connected with sight-seeing in a strange and tropical country, as well as the methods of carrying on the various industries are vividly and amusingly described. The reader is never weighed down by the consciousness of unpleasant circumstances, which were, of necessity, more or less numerous. Life, or at least the life of travelers in this region, appears to be full of good cheer. The style is bright and captivating throughout.

* "The Spell of Ashtaroth" By Duffield Osborne. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

† "Yankee Girls in Zulu Land." By Louise Vescelius-Sheldon. Illustrated by G. E. Graves, after sketches from life by E. J. Austen. New York: Worthington Co.

The illustrations, after sketches from real life, are rarely good, and, what is still rarer, have lost nothing in the process of reproduction. The entire outfit of the volume is as attractive to the eye as the contents are to the lovers of travel and adventure.

“Befo’ de War” is another delving into a field that is being very thoroughly worked at present, and this time it results in a volume of poems,* the first six of which are from the pen of Mr. Thomas Nelson Page, and the remaining score or more the work of Mr. A. C. Gordon. In subject and style there is little variety. There is generally an old negro, devoted to the memory of an old master and “missis” who lived in the roseate days “befo’ de war,” and he has some story to tell of the glories of that far-away time. It is impossible not to conclude that the poetry of this period has already been sung in prose in much better fashion, and also that a large proportion of the rhyming words in these little verses owe their selection to sound alone. Yet without being especially poetical or novel, the volume is pleasant reading.

Julian Hawthorne seems to delight in sketching out-of-the-way subjects and characters. In this collection of stories † we find a good deal to interest, and not a little to criticise and question. The stories themselves are readable, but scarcely can be called amusing, and are almost without point or purpose. One reads on in the hope of finding something worth reading, and, without being altogether disappointed, closes the book at last with a feeling akin to vexation at having wasted so much time. The clergyman who throws aside his manhood, and becomes a profligate and gamster from the very moment he steps into a fortune, has no existence in reality. The moral descent is altogether too sudden. It takes time to develop so well-finished and consummate a fool as the reverend David Poindexter out of the material of his former self; and moreover, his supposed conversion to piety when his wealth had flown is quite inconsistent with the trickery and deception he practiced to regain possession of a portion of his wasted riches. “Ken’s Mystery” is a mere wild dream, and might have been evolved from the fumes of a good hot whiskey punch. The same might be said of “My Friend Paton,” if it had any romance in it, which it has not. The other stories have some point about them, and are interesting as psychological studies. That a man should be swayed by a pure but seemingly hopeless passion, and then, when Providence puts him in the way of happiness, should fly from the opening paradise, is so unusual a phenomenon that the explanation of it cannot be uninteresting, and Mr. Hawthorne certainly makes out a case for his hero. On the other hand, that a man of forty, who holds captive the heart of a lovely maiden of half his years, should magnanimously yield her up to “a former attachment,” without a struggle, on the ground of disparity of age, and should send his blessing and fifty thousand dollars to the wedd^{ing}, is quite a respectable peg on which to hang a series of philosophic meditations suitable to middle-aged and wealthy bachelors, but from which they will hardly derive any substantial comfort.

GRIEF, love and immortality are the themes which Mr. Stuart Sterne most frequently chooses in his latest collection of poems.‡ If sometimes sentimental, he

* “Befo’ de War.” Echoes in negro dialect. By A. C. Gordon and Thomas Nelson Page. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

† “David Poindexter’s Disappearance,” and Other Tales. By Julian Hawthorne. D. Appleton & Co.

‡ “Beyond the Shadow, and Other Poems.” By Stuart Sterne. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

is oftener the interpreter of rare and beautiful thoughts. The expression is not always of equal merit with the ideas which it seeks to convey, but the true poet nature speaks plainly in the pages, and there is many a gem between the small covers.

From *Bybury to Beacon Street** is a desultory discussion of various social and domestic problems in the form of a story. The scene is laid in a dull country village, where some bright people make plans for profitable social recreations in the winter season, and the story goes on its way through thirty-two chapters, evolving very little that is new or entertaining. The multiplicity of uninteresting characters who write interminable letters to each other on trite themes weary the reader, and it is only occasionally that he comes upon a bright saying which recalls to his mind the fact that Mrs. Diaz *has* written some bright books.

A plain, neat edition of Miss Jane Andrews' well-known story,† illustrative of the universal brotherhood of mankind, has just been issued in the series of "Classics for Home and School," and in this modest and inexpensive form it will add to its already wide circle of friends. A memorial of the authoress, prepared by her friend, Louisa Parsons Hopkins, prefaces the story and will be eagerly read by many who have not known of Miss Andrews except as a writer.

Another republication in the same series is Mrs. Horace Mann's *Flower People*,‡ which first saw the light, if we mistake not, some twenty-five years ago. But the principles of botany which are so happily illustrated in the lives of the crocus, violet, anemone and their sister flower families, are the same now as then, and the little story will find a place in the hearts of all flower-loving children.

In Mr. Blaisdell's scheme for the study of English and American literature,§ biographical details are very wisely made subordinate to the actual products of the author's brain. The massing together of dates and events, usually unimportant in the life of a distinguished writer, yields no harvest to the student beyond the possible strengthening of the memory. The methods which Mr. Blaisdell has briefly outlined in a previous work are here elaborated, and commend themselves as being excellent working models. Selections from the best English and American authors are given, with full directions as to treatment in the class-room, and the systematic and thorough study of the text. The author shows inexcusable lack of taste or judgment in choosing the threadbare selections of well-known writers, and passing by the less familiar but seldom used portions of Scott, Tennyson, Holmes and Hawthorne.

* "Bybury to Beacon Street" By Mrs. A. M. Diaz. D. Lothrop Company.

† "The Seven Little Sisters who Live on the Round Ball that Floats in the Air." With an introduction by Louisa Hopkins Parsons, Supervisor in the Boston Public Schools. Lee & Shepard.

‡ "The Flower People." By Mrs. Horace Mann. Lee & Shepard.

§ "First Steps with American and British Authors" By Albert F. Blaisdell, A. M. Lee & Shepard.